

Rethinking Program Sustainability:

A look at the Minnesota Center for Youth Development's Children Youth and Families At Risk Project

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Introduction

Grants offer new resources and opportunities to Extension programs and the communities in which they take place. **Sustainability** must be prioritized in the program design and development of the grant-funded project or it runs the risk of garnering resentment and disappointment within communities. The Extension Center for Youth Development Children, Youth and Families At Risk (CYFAR) team recently successfully completed a five-year sustainable communities project (2008-2013). Youth programs in Willmar, Winona and St. Paul were sustained.

This poster presentation uses Mancini and Marek's (2004) program theory of sustainability to demonstrate the ways in which the Minnesota CYFAR project successfully sustained the benefits of the project past the life-cycle of the grant while making the case that the securement of more funds is not the sole means of achieving sustainability.

Programs

The CYFAR team established eight youth programs across the state, (St. Paul, Willmar and Winona) for middle school aged youth and their parents or guardians of diverse backgrounds living in low income households. The youth and adults were from ethnically and culturally diverse backgrounds: Latino/a, Somali, African American, American Indian, European American, and Southeast Asian, including recent immigrants and families that have been in the US for generations. Program achievements include: Youth participants gained **mastery** of new skills and knowledge, youth **set educational goals** with higher education in mind and youth **worked with their parents** on setting these goals and designed a plan for their future.



The Minnesota Sustainable Communities Project was funded by an annual congressional appropriation for the national Children, Youth and Families At Risk Program, allocated by NIFA from 2008 to 2013.

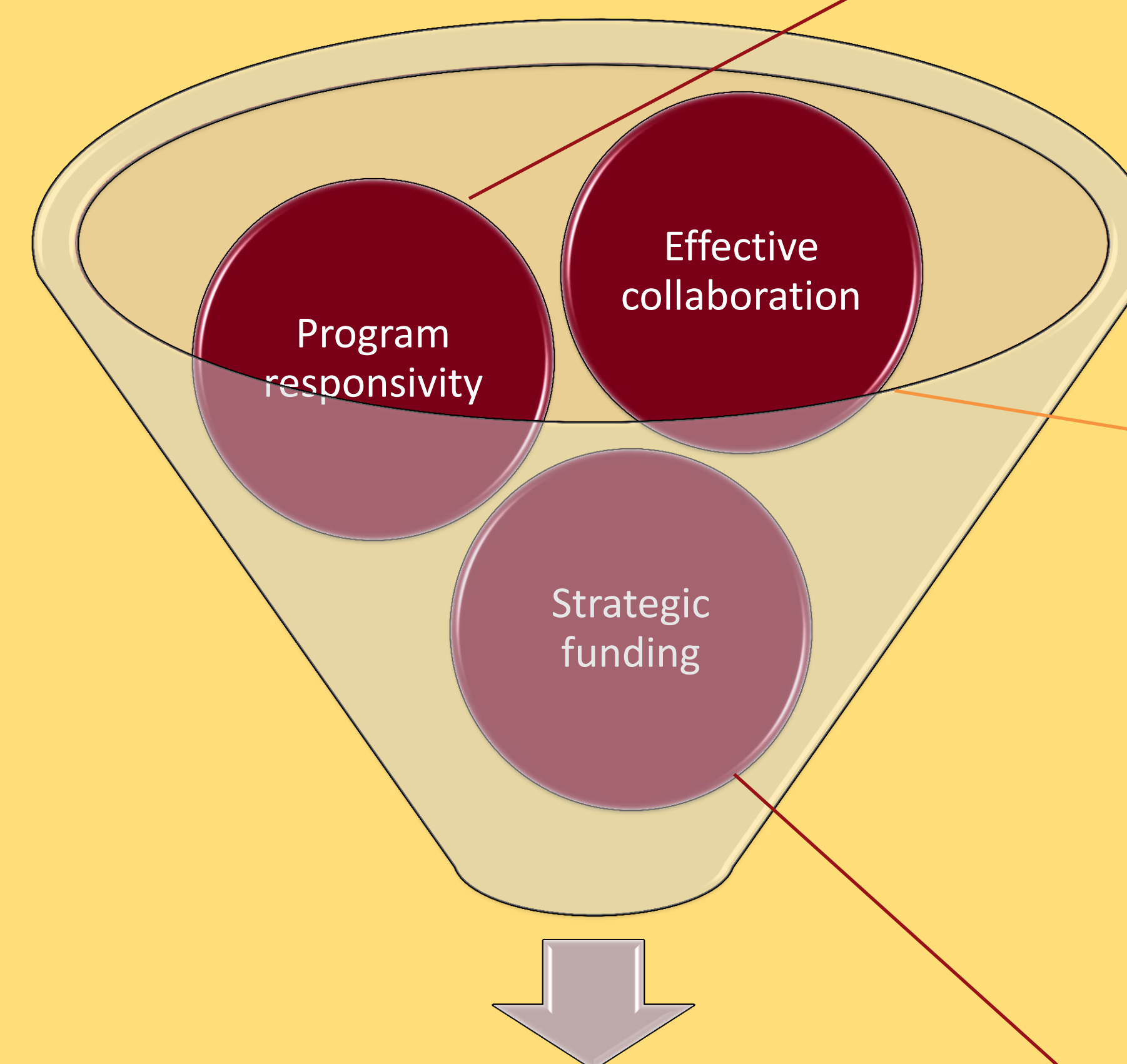


Program Theory of Sustainability

Marek and Mancini (2004) conceptualize **sustainability** as “the capacity of programs to continuously respond to community issues.” The program theory includes a seven-factor framework that includes:

- Leadership competence
- **Program responsiveness**
- Understanding the community
- **Effective collaboration**
- Demonstrating program results
- Staff involvement and integration
- **Strategic funding**

The MN CYFAR successfully implemented three of these factors:



Sustained
MN CYFAR Programs

CYFAR Team Members

Jennifer Skuza (P.I.), Tim Sheldon, Joanna Tzenis, Kathy Olson, Jessica Russo, Joyce Strand, Mary Weyandt, Catherin Swensen, Maureen Mahoney, Susan Bobolink, Paul Red Elk, Allison Berth, Trisha Sheehan, Tammy Rudningen, Krista Lautenschlager, Scott Thompson, Ben Panchyshyn, Aggie Meium, Ann Walter, Carolyn Dingfelder, Fatima Said, Debra Moe, Linda Olson, Carol Marchant, Linda Bedtka, Hannah Schoen, Jessica Rupert, Meagan Lord, Janet Beyer, and Greg Walton.

Sustainability Achievements

Program Responsivity:

The ability of a project to adapt programming and meet changing community needs

- When the grant ended there were not enough funds to support three separate programs in **Willmar** Middle School. In response, the three programs consolidated into one.
- A program in **Winona** went from having paid staff to being volunteer led. Volunteers are recruited from the Winona State University student body who lead the program as part of service learning projects.

Effective Collaboration:

Involves identification of relevant stakeholders who support program goals and have clear responsibilities.

CYFAR program implementation was carried out collaboratively by committed local team members. Project goals and program design were supported by the local team.

- In **St. Paul**, the school administration, teachers leading the program, community elders and 4-H worked collaboratively to secure a promise fellow to lead the delivery of program within the school's after school program.
- **The Winona** team brought in local businesses, Winona State University, Winona County to collaborate with Winona County 4-H in carrying out these programs life-cycle of the grant.

Strategic Funding:

Having plans and resources in place to support program requirements

- Before the end of the grant cycle, part-time CYFAR staff in both **Willmar** and **St. Paul** were hired as program coordinators; CYFAR programs are included in their plan of work. Salaries are supported by their 4-H counties and new grants.
- Being able to “demonstrate program results” led to securing other funds to sustain programs in **Winona** and **St. Paul**. Funds have been secured by local businesses and grants.

Reference:
Mancini, J.A. & Marek, L.I. (2004). *Sustaining community-based programs for families: Conceptualization and measurement*. Family Relations. 53 (4), 339-347.

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